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Evaluation

The UNDP evaluation policy

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I. The purpose, status and scope of the policy

1. This evaluation policy sets out the purpose and basic principles of evaluation, and defines the institutional architecture for UNDP and its associated funds and programmes. The policy covers the independent evaluations conducted by the Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP; the decentralized evaluations commissioned by UNDP programme and policy units, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF); as well as the activities of UNDP and the Independent Evaluation Office in support of national evaluation capacity.

2. The evaluation policy is aligned with the overall mandates of UNDP and its associated programmes and funds, and with the Charter of the United Nations and its objectives. The guiding principles stem from General Assembly resolutions, Executive Board decisions, and the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

II. The purpose of evaluation

3. This policy follows the UNEG definition of evaluation as "an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance". Evaluations should focus on expected and achieved accomplishments, critically examining the presumed causal chains, processes, and attainment of results, as well as the contextual factors that may enhance or impede the achievement of results. Evaluations focus on determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of UNDP work in order to make adjustments and improve contributions to development.

Learning: evaluations support better decision-making and promote learning among stakeholders.

4. A strong culture of evaluation is a prerequisite for a learning organization. Evaluations are important tools for helping UNDP, UNCDF and UNV to learn from past experience and better understand what types of development support work well, and not so well, and in what contexts. Evaluations serve course-corrective decision-making by way of evidential data collection, reflection and analysis, as well as impartial judgement. The scope, design and implementation of an evaluation should generate relevant, cost-effective and timely information. All evaluations should drive organizational learning.

Accountability: evaluations help stakeholders to hold UNDP accountable for contributing to development results at different levels.

5. In addition to learning, evaluations help hold UNDP and its associated programmes and funds accountable to stakeholders (including the Executive Board, the funders of programmes and the governments and citizens of the countries where they work). Evaluations thus constitute an important source of evidence for monitoring organizational performance.

Improved national evaluation capacity enhances progress towards the sustainable development goals.

6. Apart from the conduct of independent and decentralized evaluations of the work of UNDP, support to national evaluation capacity is embraced as a programmatic priority in its own right, in line with General Assembly resolution 69/237. When appropriately tailored to national circumstances and priorities, the evaluation function is an effective country-led vehicle for greater citizen accountability that can accelerate progress towards national sustainable development goals priorities, drawing on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders, including national parliamentarians.

III. Evaluation principles

7. Evaluations should be guided by the UNDP people-centred approach to development, which enhances capabilities, choices and rights for all men and women. Evaluation abides by universally shared values of equity, justice, gender equality and respect for diversity. Accordingly, the UNDP evaluation policy is guided by Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/16, in which the Council required the systematic integration of human rights and gender equality in evaluating the operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

8. In carrying out their evaluation functions, UNDP, UNCDF and UNV adhere to the interrelated evaluation principles of impartiality, credibility and utility. The organizations are expected to adhere to the following principles:

High ethical standards and norms must be upheld

9. Evaluators must have personal and professional integrity, and all evaluators, whether staff of the Independent Evaluation Office or consultants, must conduct evaluations in line with the UNEG *Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation*.

10. Evaluators must be sensitive to the beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environments in which they work, and evaluations must be conducted legally. In light of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender equality.

11. Evaluators must respect the right of institutions and individuals to provide information in confidence and ensure that sensitive data cannot be traced to their source, while ensuring that individual evaluation findings are triangulated so as to avoid being based solely on evidence that cannot be disclosed or verified.

12. Evaluations sometimes uncover evidence of wrongdoing. Such cases must be reported to the appropriate investigative body. Evaluators are not expected to evaluate the personal performance of individuals.

Evaluations must be independent, impartial and credible

13. All evaluations must be independent, and this independence has both ethical and structural dimensions. Independent evaluation constitutes an objective assessment of a subject free from undue influences that distort or bias the conduct or findings of an evaluation. Independence also means that there is structural freedom over the conduct of evaluations. Vital attributes such as impartiality and credibility speak to the ethical aspects of independence, whereas the architecture of the evaluation function, and the procedures set in place to manage evaluations, relate to the structural aspects of independence.

14. Evaluations must be impartial. Impartiality contributes to the credibility of both independent and decentralized evaluations and helps avoid or neutralize bias in findings, analyses and conclusions.

15. Evaluation procedures and findings must be credible. This entails meaningful consultation on such matters as the scope and objectives of evaluations and the availability of accurate data and the timing of deliverables – matters that require establishing trust and confidence with stakeholders. Credibility is enhanced when impartiality is maintained across all stages of the evaluation process, from formulation, to implementation, to public dissemination.

Planning and implementation of evaluations must be rule-bound

16. All evaluations should be designed and conducted according to UNEG norms and standards. The principles of credibility should be demonstrated through transparent and explicit evaluation processes, with due consultation and recognition of the right to respond by the evaluated party. Individual evaluations should be subject to quality assurance, and overall systems and processes of evaluation practice should be subject to periodic independent review.

17. The rationale for evaluations should be stated clearly from the outset. The scope, design and plan for evaluations should take into account relevant results frameworks approved by the Executive Board, particularly the UNDP strategic plan and the associated integrated results and resources framework, as appropriate.

18. To maintain impartiality across evaluations commissioned by bureaus and country offices, evaluations should not be carried out by UNDP staff with a vested interest in the result. 'Staff with a vested interest' refers to anyone responsible for or benefiting from association with the item subject to evaluation. Evaluators must also be independent from Member State governments. This independence provides legitimacy to evaluation and reduces the potential for conflicts of interest.

Evaluations should be carried out with high technical competence and rigour

19. The professionalism of evaluators and their effective use of appropriate evaluation methods are critical. Key questions and areas for investigation should be clear, coherent and realistic. Evaluation plans should be practical and cost-effective. Evaluations should be built on explicit results frameworks and theories of change, where available.

20. To ensure that information generated is accurate and reliable, data collection, analysis and dissemination for all evaluations should meet the quality standards defined by UNEG and set out in UNDP guidance. Where appropriate, they should also reflect internationally recognized professional standards, with due regard for any circumstances or limitations stemming from the evaluation context. Emphasis should be placed on the development of well-crafted terms of reference.

21. Evaluator competence is critical. Evaluators should have the skills necessary to carry out data collection and analysis and establish the relevance and strength of evidence to support conclusions; and experience with methods that combine evidence from multiple sources to reach an overall evaluative conclusion. Evaluators must understand the difference between independently verified and self-reported data. They should be up to date on new methodologies and possess proven competencies in line with the standards of the evaluation profession.

Evaluation processes should be transparent and fully engaged with stakeholders

22. Meaningful consultation with UNDP management and other stakeholders is essential for the credibility and utility of independent evaluations. Without compromising their independence, and in order to promote an evaluation culture based on knowledge-sharing, evaluation managers should include key users throughout each stage of the evaluation process. Information on evaluation design and methodology should be shared with stakeholders throughout the evaluation process, to build confidence in the eventual findings and to ensure an understanding of their circumstances in decision-making.

23. All UNDP evaluations are to be made publicly available and should be presented by the Independent Evaluation Office and UNDP through relevant platforms and events.

24. To foster credibility, evaluations at UNDP should be planned and conducted in a manner that promotes national ownership and increases the participation of national counterparts,

including beneficiaries, through inclusive and participatory approaches, and in accordance with the principles of aid effectiveness – particularly national ownership and mutual accountability. This may involve, where appropriate, partnering with national evaluation organizations and supporting country-led evaluations. Capacity-building initiatives include guidance, training, and the enhanced use of best practices and lessons learned.

IV. Evaluation procedures and quality assurance

Evaluation systems should be properly resourced, quality assured and independently assessed

25. Both the overall system and individual evaluations should be adequately resourced, and budgets should be consistent with ambition. Resources are allocated to evaluation through a series of evaluation plans covering programmes at the country, regional and global levels, as well as through the medium-term evaluation plan of the Independent Evaluation Office.

26. At the overall organizational level, UNDP will aim at allocating 1 per cent of combined programmatic (core and non-core) resources to the evaluation function; with no less than 0.2 per cent reserved for the work of the Independent Evaluation Office, subject to availability of resources.

27. UNDP regional evaluation advisers work with senior managers accountable for development results in the regions. They assist regional and country offices in preparing high-quality terms of reference for evaluations prior to their launch, and help to identify qualified independent evaluators for decentralized evaluations to avoid or mitigate potential conflicts of interest. They assist, where appropriate, in the design, management and follow-up of decentralized evaluations.

28. The Independent Evaluation Office manages a quality assessment system for decentralized evaluations, providing feedback on performance to UNDP bureaus and country offices, and reporting annually to the Executive Board. The system includes all evaluations commissioned by UNDP, UNCDF and UNV.

Clear delineations should be made between the evaluation and monitoring functions

29. While they are mutually supportive, there is a distinct difference between the evaluation and monitoring functions. Monitoring is a continuous management function that provides managers and key stakeholders with regular feedback on the consistency or discrepancy between planned and actual activities and programme performance, and on the internal and external factors affecting results. Evaluation is an independent judgment, based on criteria and benchmarks agreed among key partners and stakeholders. There needs to be a clear delineation of these roles and clarity on the resources (financial and human) provided to each.

Strengthening performance measurement systems will enhance the quality of evaluations

30. The quality and utility of evaluations are greatly enhanced by project and programme results frameworks, which establish the logical sequence of planned results and include a 'theory of change' articulating how activities and outputs are expected to lead to desired outcomes and results. Performance indicators should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound ('SMART').

Management should respond to all evaluation recommendations

31. Management at UNDP, UNCDF and UNV prepare management responses to all independent and decentralized evaluations. Management responses to evaluation recommendations should include specific, time-bound actions with clearly assigned responsibilities to implement them. These responses are discussed with stakeholders and made public through the online Evaluation Resource Centre, and their implementation status

is reported to the Executive Board in the annual evaluation reports prepared by Independent Evaluation Office. The management responses to independent thematic and global and regional programme evaluations are submitted to the Executive Board for review, together with the corresponding evaluations.

32. UNDP, UNCDF and UNV report annually to the Executive Board on their management responses and actions taken. The Independent Evaluation Office analyses the reports each year through in-country follow-up, including assessments of development results and periodic spot-checking of samples of completed and evaluated programmes and projects.

Joint programming should be evaluated jointly

33. Greater structural coherence across the United Nations system, including the expansion of joint programming and 'delivering as one' modalities, requires a corresponding effort to 'evaluate as one', where feasible. UNDP plays a pivotal role in the efforts of the United Nations system to achieve greater structural coherence through evaluation within the context of its role as a founding member and major funder of UNEG.

V. UNDP evaluation architecture

Institutional framework

34. The evaluation architecture of UNDP, UNCDF and UNV to comply with the above principles and implement the policy is set out below. UNDP has a bifurcated evaluation system, with broad thematic, programmatic and country-level evaluations carried out by the Independent Evaluation Office, on the one hand, and decentralized evaluations commissioned by the programme units (policy and regional bureaus and country offices), on the other.

The Executive Board

35. The Executive Board is the custodian of the evaluation policy; it approves the policy, annually considers its implementation, and periodically commissions independent reviews of the policy. The Board approves the biennial financial appropriation to the Independent Evaluation Office in the context of the UNDP integrated budget and financial rules and regulations, and undertakes periodic reviews and adjustments of such appropriations based on the programme of work of the Office, which the Board also approves. The Office submits independent thematic and programmatic evaluations to the Executive Board, which approves the management responses as appropriate. The Board is consulted on the recruitment of the Director of the Office.

The UNDP Administrator

36. The Administrator:

(a) Safeguards the integrity of the evaluation function, ensuring its independence from operational management and activities;

(b) Ensures that adequate financial resources are allocated to the evaluation function across the organization, in accordance with the Executive Board-approved financial appropriation for Independent Evaluation Office, and reports to the Board annually on the volume of resources that the organization has invested in evaluation;

(c) Ensures that the Office has unfettered access to data and information required for the evaluation of UNDP performance; and

(d) Appoints the Director of the Office in consultation with the Executive Board, taking into account the advice of the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee, whose roles and responsibilities are further delineated below.

UNDP programme and policy units

37. The UNDP programme and policy units commission decentralized evaluations according to evaluation plans that coincide with relevant programmes (global, regional and country). The evaluations are to be carried out by independent external consultants, and UNDP management shall take all necessary actions to ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the process and persons hired.

38. The Bureau for Policy and Programme Support coordinates communication between UNDP management and the Independent Evaluation Office, and advises country offices and regional bureaus on the decentralized evaluation function for UNDP. The Bureau works with the monitoring and evaluation staff of UNDP units to ensure that evaluation plans are properly implemented. Together with the Office, the Bureau provides guidance to UNDP units on the use of evaluation findings and lessons to improve organizational decision-making and accountability, and synthesizes evaluation lessons for institutional learning. It also monitors implementation of the management responses to independent evaluations and decentralized evaluations in UNDP.

UNCDF and UNV

39. UNCDF and UNV have established evaluation units that commission decentralized evaluations in ways similar to those used by the UNDP policy and programme units. These organizations establish evaluation plans, allocate funding, commission evaluators, provide management responses, and learn from evaluation results.

The Independent Evaluation Office

40. The Independent Evaluation Office is a functionally independent unit within UNDP that supports the oversight and accountability functions of the Executive Board and the management of UNDP, UNCDF and UNV. The structural independence of the Office underpins and guarantees its freedom to conduct evaluations and report evaluation results to the Executive Board.

41. The main role of Office is to conduct independent evaluations according to the plans and costed programmes of work approved by the Executive Board. The work of the Office includes:

(a) Developing evaluation standards, procedures, criteria and methodological guidance for UNDP evaluations, and contributing to innovation in evaluation methodology and dissemination of good practices;

(b) Conducting thematic programmatic and other independent evaluations, ensuring strategic and representative coverage of UNDP programmes and results against national, regional and global scales;

(c) Providing UNDP and its development partners with timely knowledge and lessons drawn from evaluations that can feed into development programming at global, regional and country levels;

(d) Assessing the quality of decentralized evaluations of UNDP, UNCDF and UNV, and monitoring compliance with best international evaluation and data collection standards, including the UNEG norms and standards, code of conduct and ethical guidelines;

(e) Maintaining a searchable, publicly accessible repository of all UNDP, UNCDF and UNV evaluations, and respective management responses and resulting actions;

(f) Supporting the development of communities of practice, and partnering with professional evaluation networks to improve evaluation utility and credibility;

(g) Supporting the harmonization of the evaluation function in the United Nations system, including contributing to the annual work programme of UNEG, participating in system-wide evaluations, and prioritizing joint evaluations with United Nations organizations;

(h) Promoting national ownership and leadership in evaluation through country-led and joint evaluations.

Director, Independent Evaluation Office

42. The Independent Evaluation Office is led by a Director who is responsible for ensuring its independence, as well as the impartiality and credibility of its work; and who reports directly to and is accountable to the UNDP Executive Board.

43. The Director manages the Office in accordance with UNEG norms and standards and UNDP policies and procedures, securing structural and operational independence.

44. In all aspects of his or her work, the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office shall operate within the rules and regulations of the UNDP, and in accordance with United Nations standards of conduct for the International Civil Service, United Nations staff regulations and rules, and UNEG norms and standards.

45. The Director has the freedom to engage directly with external stakeholders in the course of implementing this policy, in accordance with United Nations standards of conduct for the International Civil Service.

46. The roles and responsibilities of the Director include:

(a) Periodically manage the process of revising this policy at the request of the Executive Board, in consultation with UNDP management;

(b) Manage the Office and its budget in a fiscally responsible manner, including contributions from partners;

(c) Manage recruitment of staff for the Office in line with UNDP recruitment procedures and UNEG competencies for evaluators, and take the final decision on selection of staff;

(d) After consultation with UNDP management, present to the Executive Board a multi-year evaluation plan aligned with the UNDP strategic planning cycle: the programme of work is to be adjusted annually through a costed programme of work presented to the Executive Board in the annual reports on evaluation;

(e) Annually report to the Executive Board on the status of the evaluation function under this policy, including key issues for consideration by the Board derived from independent evaluations carried out;

(f) Regularly alert UNDP senior management to emerging evaluation-related issues of institutional significance, without taking part in decision-making;

(g) Set evaluation standards, procedures and criteria, approve methodological guidance on UNDP evaluations, and ensure the availability of evaluation quality assessment mechanisms so as to continuously improve and enhance the quality, credibility and utility of UNDP evaluations;

(h) Have the final say on the content and release of evaluations carried out by the Office, in accordance with UNDP Executive Board decisions (evaluation reports will be issued under the imprimatur of the Office); and

(i) Ensure that evaluation in UNDP contributes to and remains consistent with United Nations policy and reforms.

Appointment of the Director, Independent Evaluation Office

47. The appointment of the Director is the responsibility of the Administrator, in consultation with the Executive Board, taking into account the advice of the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee.

48. In addition to standard UNDP hiring procedures, selection of the Director shall include the following aspects:

(a) Selection will be based on professional evaluation expertise and competence, as defined in the UNEG guidelines and competency framework for heads of evaluation; and

(b) A full disclosure, in writing, shall be made to the Bureau of the Executive Board, outlining the selection criteria and process.

49. The term of appointment of the Director is limited to a single, five-year term, non-renewable and barring re-entry to UNDP.

50. Dismissal of the Director due to poor performance, misconduct or malfeasance, shall follow UNDP policies and procedures, after consultation with the Executive Board through its Bureau. The Director cannot be dismissed for public statements made in the conduct of his or her work, consistent with UNDP staff rules and regulations and the United Nations standards of conduct for the International Civil Service.

Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee

51. The UNDP Audit Advisory Committee has been expanded to include evaluation oversight functions. Renamed the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee, its members advise the UNDP Administrator and Director of the Independent Evaluation Office in fulfilling their responsibilities for the UNDP evaluation function as set out in this policy.

52. At least two members of the Committee will serve based on their recognized global stature and expertise in the evaluation of development organizations.

53. With respect to evaluation, the Committee will review and advise the Administrator on:

(a) the evaluation policy;

(b) appointment and dismissal of the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office;

(c) multi-year and annual work plans, budget, and periodic reports of the Independent Evaluation Office;

(d) thematic and programmatic evaluation reports and management responses; and

(e) the UNDP decentralized evaluation function, and national evaluation capacity programming.

VI. Implementation of the UNDP evaluation policy

54. Notwithstanding its independence as enshrined in this evaluation policy, the Independent Evaluation Office, as an integral division within the overall organizational structure of UNDP, will follow all applicable UNDP rules and procedures. It will likewise be entitled to benefit from the same support services (including human resources, administration, financial services, information technology, and communication) that are provided to all other departments and divisions, in accordance with prevailing rules and regulations.

55. This policy is operationalized through several strategies and plans approved by the Executive Board. These are:

(a) *The multi-year evaluation plan.* The Office prepares a multi-year evaluation plan that is consistent with the UNDP strategic plan. It also provides the Executive Board with a costed programme of work to implement the evaluation plan on an annual basis;

(b) *Evaluation plans for UNDP global, regional and country programmes.* These are approved by the Executive Board concurrently with its consideration of the related programme documents;

(c) *Evaluation plans for UNCDF and UNV.* Each organization prepares a multi-year evaluation plan that is aligned with its strategic plan, and a biennial costed programme of work for evaluation concurrent with its overall evaluation budget;

(d) A comprehensive and strategic evaluation plan should contain an appropriate mix of programme and project evaluations, including joint evaluations. When required by a cost-sharing agreement or partnership protocol (such as the Global Environment Facility), evaluations are mandatory, and must be included in evaluation plans;

(e) All evaluation plans must be fully costed and accompanied by text explaining the logic of including the evaluations in the plan.

56. The Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee is a de facto advisory body to the UNDP Administrator. In addition, the Director of the Independent Evaluation Office may establish and manage an international evaluation advisory panel to advise UNDP management and the Director on independent and decentralized evaluation strategies and methods. The panel should be composed with due consideration to the geographic and sectoral diversity appropriate to the work of UNDP. The International Evaluation Advisory Panel should support the evaluation function in UNDP, providing feedback and expert peer review pertaining to UNDP evaluations.

Annual reporting

57. The status of implementation of this policy is reported by the Independent Evaluation Office to the Executive Board at each annual session as part of its annual report on evaluation. Each annual report will be critiqued by the Audit and Evaluation Advisory Committee and should include the following elements:

(a) *Independent evaluation*. A presentation of the activities and achievements of the Office during the previous year and programme of work for the current and following year;

(b) *Decentralized evaluations*. A factual description, together with an assessment of the status, quality and utility of decentralized evaluations commissioned by UNDP, UNCDF and UNV;

(c) *Strengthening UNDP through evaluation*. A synthesis of the main findings, conclusions and lessons from independent and decentralized evaluations about the performance of UNDP; and

(d) *Evaluation methodology*. An examination of lessons on methodology, approach and process, learned from the independent and decentralized evaluations conducted each year.